DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 654 CS 508 220

AUTHOR Ames, Ina Ruth
TITLE The Metaphor of Open Admissions as a Communication Paradigm.
PUB DATE 30 Oct 92
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (78th, Chicago, IL, October 29-November 1, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Cultural Differences; Educational Trends; *Faculty College Relationship; *Higher Education; *Open Enrollment; *Oral Tradition; *Student Characteristics; Student College Relationship; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Universities
IDENTIFIERS *Mount Ida College MA

ABSTRACT

The metaphor of "open admissions," a consistent communication tradition at Mount Ida College, Massachusetts, is an oral tradition that has survived the many metamorphoses the college has experienced and provided consistency for the college mission and population. Begun as the Mount Ida School for Girls, the school was both Mount Ida School for Girls and a junior college by the 1920s. In 1982, it began granting baccalaureate degrees and became Mount Ida College. The college merged with several other schools and colleges in the late 1980s. The admissions policy created a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic population long before that of other institutions. Even though the college has shifted to a "participatory management" approach that no longer reflects the tradition of the past, the institution's cultural tradition of open admissions has better prepared Mount Ida College for the greater shifts in cultural diversity than many other colleges. Faculty have more experience and expertise in delivering both academic material and individual counseling to students from varied backgrounds than peers at other colleges. Open admissions as a metaphor will remain a cause of creative tension between the faculty and the administration, but that tension has contributed to the college's being prepared for the immense influx of cultural diversity that has caused social identity problems on many campuses. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 360 654

"The Metaphor of Open Admissions As a Communication Paradigm"

by
Ina Ruth Ames
Mount Ida College
Newton Centre, Massachusetts 02159
617-969-7000 x 192

A Paper Presented at the
78th Annual Meeting
of the
Speech Communication Association
Chicago, Illinois
October 30, 1992

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ina R Ames

TO THE EDUCATION RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ina Ames

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS508220

The Metaphor of Open Admissions as a Communication Paradigm

Oral traditions is a topic not often discussed in the 1980's or 90's in the Communication discipline. The shift years ago from discussing oral traditions to discussing communication traditions opened up the possibility of discussing traditions in media other than the spoken word. What was lost in the shift was the shared value in Communication theorists and Anthropologists studying a culture by observing and tracing the oral traditions of the culture. The history and flow of oral traditions allow the theorist the ability to discover central themes, metaphors and myths of a culture's world view and to delineate shifts in the culture through the study of the oral traditions before, during and after major cultural changes and paradigm shifts. The metaphor of "Open Admissions" as a consistent communication tradition at Mount Ida College, a small Liberal Arts College in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, is a prime example of an oral tradition that has survived the many metamorphoses the college has experienced and which has provided consistency for the college mission and population.

"Open Admissions" is a college policy in which most (not truly all) students who apply and can pay or raise sufficient financial aid are allowed to attend the college. The metaphor of open admissions is an oxymoron in itself in that there are no known colleges where truly anyone can enter. A high school diploma or equivalency and some demonstration of potential growth and

development are the usual minimal prerequisites to admissions. Most colleges prefer to establish specific criteria for admissions including high school rank, SAT and ACT scores, demonstration of leadership in and participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. This develops a college specific nature to the college population There is a belief that academic excellence and open admissions are mutually exclusive. Therefore, the existence of an open conversation of "Open Admissions" as an asset at Mount Ida can be seen as an unusual communication paradigm in the academic community.

Mount Ida, as a school and college, has gone through many transformations in its almost 100 years. The college actually began as Mount Ida School for Girls. In 1907, the founder experimented with a new post-secondary curriculum that was called "Advanced Studies." This became the genesis of the Junior College. By the 1920's, the school was both Mount Ida School for Girls and the Junior College -- and the Junior College was a member of the American Association of Junior Colleges. In the early 1970's the college began admitting male students as commuting students. In 1982, the college changed its name from Mount Ida Junior College to Mount Ida College with the granting of the initial baccalaureate degree in an innovative two plus two undergraduate system of a two-year associate degree potentially followed by a two-year bachelor degree. In 1987, Mount Ida's dormitories became co-

educational. Over the past several years, the college has merged with Chamberlayne Junior College (1988-1989), acquired the Coyne School of Electricity in that merger, and merged with the New England Institute of Arts and Sciences(1989-1990). Since I first began teaching at the college in 1982, the student population has grown from approximately 650 students to approximately 1700 students.

Other ongoing transformations include demographic changes in the cultural diversity of the college. Mount Ida's admissions policy created a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic population long before that of other institutions. The shifts from an all-female to a co-educational college and then from all-female to co-educational dormitories are small examples of the changes. The college has always had a percentage of international students; however, the number of cultures represented has grown. This year the student body represents individuals from forty-eight different countries and twenty-nine of the fifty states.

Imagine a college growing three times through merging with three different schools as well as acquiring two programs from a fourth college. The college's personality, myths, metaphors and self-image have been in constant flux for the past ten years. Ten years ago, the college was a non-profit, previously family-owned institution run by the same family that acquired the Mount Ida School for Girls from its founders. It was in many senses a family --

patriarchally run -- not only with the advantages and drawbacks of a patriarchy but also with the consistency of predictable policies, job security, and the normal sense of familial rivalries. Currently the college, with the President the great-grandson of the college's founder, is run like a manufacturing firm in that decisions are made with no sense of the old tradition. Gone are such concepts as loyalty to the school or to employees, job security, and both the friendly familial rivalries and the sense of belonging. All the intrigue and politics of a competitive manufacturing firm are now present in the college. This has been attributed to a "participatory management" approach the college has developed. However, the shift in culture is more than a shift from the old myth to a new management strategy. The shift in the college's administrative culture no longer reflects the traditions of the past. The college is probably more competitively placed partially as a result of the institutionalization of manufacturing marketing and employee relations, but the sense of community, family and loyalty are almost completely lost. None of the three original colleges' personalities myths or metaphors have survived these metamorphoses. While each merger has contributed greatly to the academic offerings for the college, an actual identity for the college has yet to be re-established.

One constant that has survived these major transmutations is the metaphor of open admissions. Historically, there has always

been a creative tension between the administration and faculty on the topic of an open admissions policy. An open admissions policy creates a teaching challenge in the classroom very diverse from a college where the admissions policies has historically created a college specific population.

Students in a classroom in a college with open admissions come from a larger range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This has been an advantage for Mount Ida entering the 1990's. The shift to a culturally diverse population has been a very difficult one for many college cultures. A cultural tradition of open admissions has better prepared Mount Ida for the greater shifts in cultural diversity than many other colleges. Mount Ida - as a culture - has always experienced a wide variety of cultures. Our support systems for culturally and socio-economically diverse students were being spearheaded by our Academic Standards Committee five years ago. Thus the only major adjustment in the cultural diversity policies the college has needed to make has been in the arena of residential life. The background of a diverse student population created by open admissions has enabled the college to be prepared to deal with the multi-cultural issues of the 1990's in the arenas of academic classroom and institutional support services. We are currently building on this strong foundation forged by the Academic Standards Committee in partnership with the administration several years ago, a direct result of working with the

creative tension of the demands of a culturally diverse population created by the open admissions policy.

Also intrinsic in the diverse population created by an open admissions policy was the need many years ago for the faculty to adjust academic teaching strategy to a diverse range of students within the same classroom. Classes at Mount Ida have historically contained students with diverse academic skills and backgrounds. Faculty who have been at the college have more experience and expertise in delivering both academic material and individual student counseling to students from varied backgrounds than peers at other colleges with little experience with an academically diverse population. Historically, one major disadvantage of the diverse population has been that better students have tended to transfer from non-career majors such as Liberal Arts and Individualized Studies due to the frustration of having much slower students in the class. The faculty and administration of the college (along with strong support and services from Academic support areas such as our Learning Opportunities Program, our Director of the Learning Resource Center and her team, and our Student services team) have developed strategies that long ago prepared us for the influx of the current college population. Our Junior College division branch of Phi Theta Kappa is a national leader due to the effective guidance of its advisor. This was partially a response to the need for

the college to keep our academically excellent and gifted students engaged in co-curricular activities at the college.

Thus the metaphor of open admissions has been a contributing factor as one of the few constants in a culture in flux. The paradigm of Mount Ida College - as an identity and as a communication paradigm - needs a great deal of work to be re-developed. The college is, in adjusting to the 90's, also adjusting to this new composition of populations. The transitions of the 1990's have impacted the college. Our Vice President of Academic Affairs has become an internationally known expert on the topic and purposes of college mergers. The college has managed to adjust to the challenges and changes of the 90's. In spite of the fact that the President is a member of the family that began the colleges, administrative changes have also impacted the communication paradigm of the college. The few vestiges of consistency in the college have, in many ways, been as a result of open admissions as a constant metaphor.

It is undoubtedly true that open admissions as a metaphor will remain a cause of creative tension between the faculty and the administration. It is inevitable, given the nature of academics. It is also true, however, that the metaphor of open admissions has, in that creative tension, contributed to the college's being prepared for the immense influx of cultural diversity now causing social identity problems on many campuses.

The paradigm of the college identity is still very much unsettled. The metaphor of "Open admissions," however, is one consistency in the identity that has helped shape and develop the college. It continues to be a source of controversy that adds to the college's adjustment to the changes in our society and in our culture.

The Metaphor of Open Admissions as a Communication Paradigm has provided the college with a consistent perceptual window through the major transformations of the college's mergers in the 80's and the tumultuous societal paradigm shifts of the 90's.